

Interview Transcript

Project: Mount Saint Mary's University--CSJ Oral History Project

Interview Date: 10/17/2019

Interviewee: Sister Magdalena Nava

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Roman Zenz, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Mary Trunk, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University

Location: Carondelet Center, Los Angeles, California.

Transcription Date: 11/18/2019

Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments].

[00:00:14.23] SHANNON GREEN: Okay. Today is Thursday, October 17, 2019. This is the CSJ Oral History Project from Mount Saint Mary's University, interviewing Sister Magdalena Nava, Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet, at Carondelet Center, with Mary Trunk and Roman Zenz.

[00:00:37.19] SHANNON GREEN: So, remember to just look at me, okay? And just tell me your full name and how old you are.

[00:00:43.03] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: I am Sister Magdalena Nava, and I am 81 year.

[00:00:53.08] SHANNON GREEN: Tell me where you were born and a little bit about your family.

[00:00:57.18] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: I was born in Mexico City. My family lived--were very Catholic people, and we all were happy and content. And [unintelligible] being called to religious life.

[00:01:17.25] SHANNON GREEN: What did your parents do for a living?

[00:01:19.21] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: They have their own little business.

[00:01:26.03] SHANNON GREEN: How old were you when you decided to be a Sister?

[00:01:30.07] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Well, I felt the call when I was sixteen. And I note it, and I wait until I was nineteen when I said, well, I believe God call on me so I just follow the call.

[00:01:48.03] SHANNON GREEN: Were you in a Catholic high school?

[00:01:49.26] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: No. I never went to Catholic school. I was in the--all my education was in a public school. All my education and my parents had people from the Church all the time. So, I think through them I got my vocation.

[00:02:11.27] SHANNON GREEN: Did you know Sisters in your parish? Did you--

[00:02:15.12] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: No. I didn't know any Sisters of any kind until I request to my spiritual director. He introduced me--a group of good nuns, which I joined them. Which I stay with them 25 years. Later on, I feel the call to visit a member of Sisters of St. Joseph, and I request to be transferred to the Sisters of St. Joseph.

[00:02:45.29] SHANNON GREEN: Do you remember what was it about the Sisters of St. Joseph that you wanted to be a part of? What was attractive?

[00:02:52.24] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: They attract me--their spirituality--their lifestyle, and how open they are to the needy families. With everybody, they are so open to help. And I really--I always said that they saw normal people--that was the ones--I go with them. And I did.

[00:03:17.17] SHANNON GREEN: Where did you leave them?

[00:03:19.19] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: In Los Angeles. I came to them a couple of times for retreats, for meetings when we have meetings. I was working in a parish and I have a lot of meetings. And then I met them and I really liked them. And I requested, and it took me five years to be able to be transferred to this community.

[00:03:42.26] SHANNON GREEN: What was your ministry before you transferred? What was your ministry in Mexico?

[00:03:48.28] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: In Mexico, I never work. I was--help people, I was a student. When I went into the convent, I didn't work in Mexico. I was just--the school, and from there I went to the convent, and that's--that was my life.

[00:04:07.25] SHANNON GREEN: Were you more monastic, or more cloistered as a Sister in that community?

[00:04:13.00] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: More monastic. Yeah, they didn't do--public service like--they were teaching and work in a hospital. But not allowed to talk to nobody after the work. Just working. And they wanted to be with families that need help.

[00:04:36.25] SHANNON GREEN: So, you came to Los Angeles.

[00:04:38.02] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: No, they sent me--the community is also in Los Angeles. They sent me to Los Angeles. In Los Angeles when I went to meetings, I met the Sisters of St. Joseph. And I notice how they were so open to say whatever they see the need. So, that's what I said--well, this is the community that I like to be. So. I asked to be transferred.

[00:05:03.05] SHANNON GREEN: Do you remember the day that you became a part of this community?

[00:05:07.19] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Oh, yes. That was in March, close to St. Joseph's celebration. But that process took me five years. It was not easy. But it was okay, finally.

[00:05:24.08] SHANNON GREEN: Did you feel at home here?

[00:05:27.09] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Oh yes. Oh, immediately. I feel at home. Well, I was here many times for retreats. So, when I move--be part of the community, I feel okay. I feel like all the time I've been here.

[00:05:43.04] SHANNON GREEN: So, you said that this was a very meaningful part of your life, to have been in two communities.

[00:05:51.19] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Yes.

[00:05:52.08] SHANNON GREEN: But what else do you want us to know about that experience for you?

[00:05:54.29] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: My experience that I have is meaningful, because in my first community I learn a lot how to pray, how to live, how to suffer quietly, everything. In this one, I learn with all that, to serve the "dear neighbor". And to me, is very meaningful. And I am able to do it because I had the preparation that I got in the first community.

[00:06:30.19] SHANNON GREEN: So, that--it sounds like it was a foundation for you.

[00:06:33.23] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Right.

[00:06:35.10] SHANNON GREEN: How old were you when you transferred? Do you remember?

[00:06:38.05] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Yes. I was thirty years old.

[00:06:43.23] SHANNON GREEN: And I have the history of your ministry here. So, it says that you were--you've done hospital work?

[00:06:56.09] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Yes.

[00:06:56.16] SHANNON GREEN: As well as parish work?

[00:06:58.08] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Yes.

[00:06:58.25] SHANNON GREEN: How did you--tell me about what your work in the hospitals--.

[00:07:02.25] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: In the hospital, I did not work really--as a minister. I went to visit the patients. Many of them asked for me to talk. And I introduced with a priest--that's what they needed. Also, I gave Communion to those who like it. And then, I did a lot of things. And then I also help them to get financial help in the hospital. A lot of people needed that kind of help, and they didn't know where to go. I think that's about it.

[00:07:48.13] SHANNON GREEN: Because you're from Mexico and bilingual, you must have worked with a lot of immigrants--communities, immigrant families, yes?

[00:07:56.15] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Yes.

[00:07:57.07] SHANNON GREEN: What do you--what could you share with us about your experience of the immigrant community in your ministry?

[00:08:03.18] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Like, in the parish, when the husband or whatever--is the same problems that I saw. Many of the people--you know, in Mexico, everybody is Catholic. And--in my days--I don't know about now. They came and they get lost. And the only help that they found is through the Church. And then, [unintelligible]--they never were help because they could not speak--they couldn't explain what was their need. Therefore, when I was in the hospital, that's what they keep me--work back and forth wherever--in any office where they have some Spanish-speaking. And it was the same problem--that they could not understand them. Why were there, why they were asking for help when they don't have any medical service or--things like that. So, I was translating for them most of the day.

[00:09:12.01] SHANNON GREEN: So, when you talk about the "dear neighbor", do you think about the immigrant community?

[00:09:18.17] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Yes. Everybody, but yeah, the dear neighbor, everybody--but mostly the immigrants. They may--still all over, but we don't know it. This is something--that to be in this house, nice and comfortable--I never know. I never see more than needy families--that's what I miss a lot. Every time I see what's here--nice--because--[unintelligible]. But when I young, I was all over, helping. But this time that they asked me to come here and do nothing--just to pray. So, I pray.

[00:10:02.13] SHANNON GREEN: Tell me a little bit about your parish ministry. What parish were--you were in a parish for some time, yes?

[00:10:08.25] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Yeah, different parishes. I was--I was a coordinator for all the activities in different parishes that I was. And then, the Coordinator for spiritual activities, teaching, Bible, adult education. That's what I always liked--adult education. And I spent my days teaching and organizing activities in the parish--fiestas, retreats, whatever was needed.

[00:10:48.07] SHANNON GREEN: Where did you get--did you have any theological education?

[00:10:53.00] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Yes. I went to school three years to San Antonio, Texas, where I have my degree--[unintelligible] for adult education. And then, when I finished that I came to practice in Los Angeles--whatever they asked me.

[00:11:11.26] SHANNON GREEN: Can you say anything about like--Vatican II [Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)] and how--the Second Vatican Council? How do you--how did that impact you as a Sister, as a woman of faith?

[00:11:24.04] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Well, I think it was like it opened the door for us to [wait] and help whatever you see--what--. I always wanted--I feel that I should be--not whatever is done in the parish where there's nothing going on. So, that's what--I followed that call. I was fine in one parish, but everything was so neat--until they called me to another parish--they not even want it--to have any Spanish ministry. That experience I have in two--three parishes. So, I went to that one--the first one--and I learn how to explain to the parish--should be for everyone. And it took a lot of energy and to it was not easy. But then I get the practice, and when they sent me to another one that was worse, I also--I did it. So, I just feel like I did whatever I was able to do in those days. And I wanted to continue, but because my age, they send me to come and rest.

[00:12:49.26] SHANNON GREEN: So, you've put a lot of energy into ministry for Hispanics--

[00:12:54.15] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Oh, yes.

[00:12:56.00] SHANNON GREEN: --in the parishes. Very important in Los Angeles.

[00:12:59.04] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Yeah. I went to the parishes--there was nothing. And when I left, everything was on and made me so happy to see that the people were very happy.

[00:13:12.20] SHANNON GREEN: Do you any reflections on being a woman in leadership in the Church?

[00:13:21.19] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Yes. You know, many times I was playing as a priest. [laughs]. I don't want to say that, but it was a little nuts. I really was hoping that in the future we would be able to do more than what we do. But never happened. That was a little frustration. Because really I was very much hoping to be more life in the parishes, not just Mass and that's it. No, let's keep going. And therefore, when I went to a parish, I did as much as I could. And the pastors were very nice. But some, they said, leave it as it is, because once Spanish start moving, they really like it. In some places I was successful. In some I didn't, because they said, calm down, okay? So, I still think there's a lot that needs to be done.

[00:14:36.07] SHANNON GREEN: For women, for Latinos?

[00:14:38.00] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: For women, yeah. Or Latinos, yes.

[00:14:41.03] SHANNON GREEN: And it sounds like you've come back here just this last year, just at Carondelet Center--you've retired just this last year.

[00:14:51.02] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Yes. And I wanted to stay longer, but they told me no, it's about time that you come and rest. And okay, here I am.

[00:15:00.01] SHANNON GREEN: So, it sounds like it's been an adjustment.

[00:15:02.15] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Yes. I still--I still thinking that I should be doing something in a parish, but no, I am a quite old person. Even--I don't show that much--I am more older than I look. So, that's why they told me no--no more. Okay, I came, here I am, praying for all those people that I left, and for that still don't have help in their parish.

[00:15:35.13] SHANNON GREEN: I like to ask the Sisters--what would you share with like a college student or someone who is young in faith about the Sisters of St. Joseph, and the charism? What advice do you have?

[00:15:51.01] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Well, I could say that--just a couple of things. I was talking to some. I said, well, if God calls you, just follow the call. Where you--he will tell you. Because nobody wants to say well, there [points]. No. God will tell you where to go. Just follow God's call. That what I can say.

[00:16:20.22] SHANNON GREEN: Would you tell us--what are some of your favorite things to do for fun, or your hobbies?

[00:16:26.16] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: I have quite a few. For fun it's picnics. And in the parish I was working, I work a lot with a lot of people teaching and with adult education. In that, I did a lot of fiestas, because to me, God's love is not sad, it's joy. So, I celebrated, doing different things--dinners, to get to know each other. The same as with retreats. I said, when they ask for a retreat, I said, sure, we can have a retreat. And how about we can have dinner so we can get to know each other. So, those things were together. And I have a lot of fun with the communities.

[00:17:19.19] SHANNON GREEN: Do you get to see anybody from the parish anymore--any visits?

[00:17:24.00] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: I miss it sometimes, but it's far away in the Valley. Sometimes they come from different parishes. Not too long ago came ones from Simi Valley--what a distance. And then yeah, they--I love the people. I also fall in love with the people in the parish. [unintelligible] nice this and let you see all these people, nice and quiet. In a couple of months

everybody were so cheerful and nice, and I just love parish ministry. I really did.

[00:17:57.27] SHANNON GREEN: And you told me you also have recently visited Mexico City?

[00:18:01.23] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Oh, yes.

[00:18:02.18] SHANNON GREEN: Tell me a little about your visit.

[00:18:04.27] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: My visit was great. Every time that I go, first thing is to visit a lady of Guadalupe--my mother, definitely. And then, I went home, with the family--my brothers. I have one brother and two sisters. And then also my nephews. And we get together and my entire family--we have fun. And it's just to get together is very meaningful to all of us. I've been all my life in this country. They send me over when I was nineteen, to make the--to finish my novitiate over here. So, in this country--been all over--and very little in Mexico. So, only when I go to visit.

[00:19:04.27] SHANNON GREEN: So, you have two homes--.

[00:19:06.00] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: --two homes--. Yeah. Over there--and I--you know, this is something that--I had two homes, because in Mexico they still have my little house that they did but when I come. I don't want to use my own room--I had my own, close to the others. So, I can pray, I can do whatever I want. I have all my privacy that I needed. And sometimes I go for a month.

[00:19:39.24] SHANNON GREEN: For personal renewal?

[00:19:40.24] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Yes.

[00:19:43.21] SHANNON GREEN: That's lovely. Let's see--.

[00:19:47.14] [Director's comments].

[00:19:57.06] SHANNON GREEN: Is there anything else you want to--any other story you want to share with us today, Sister Maggie?

[00:20:01.29] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: I think I'd like to share one that is very meaningful to me. That I was a member of Religious of Jesus and Mary. I was there--very happy, 25 years, and then I have a call to join Sisters of St. Joseph. And Sisters of St. Joseph, I really like it because they were involved with a lot of families, and they need it, and I wanted to be part of that kind of ministry. And it took me five years to get the permission to translate to this community, which I've been very happy. And to me, that part is meaningful, because I can be very comfortable in the other one. But because I followed this call--so, I moved to this one--and I'm still here until I die.

[00:20:55.22] SHANNON GREEN: That's beautiful. And it sounds like it was the dear neighbor--serving the needy--serving the [unintelligible]--.

[00:21:04.22] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Yes. It's great.

[00:21:10.06] SHANNON GREEN: Yeah. If I said to you, what is the charism? What is the spirit of the Sisters of St. Joseph, how would you summarize?

[00:21:17.27] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: The dear love to the dear neighbor. And the neighbor's the most needed. Like I said, that's the ones that we should be more open to the dear neighbors, which is plenty of people all over.

[00:21:40.29] SHANNON GREEN: That is true. That is true. That's all I have for you.

[00:21:47.29] SISTER MAGDALENA NAVA: Well, thank you very much.

[00:21:49.15] SHANNON GREEN: Thank you so much. That was wonderful.

[00:21:51.00] [Director's comments].

[00:22:01.06] End of interview.

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